



Michigan Supreme Court
State Court Administrative Office

Case File Management Standards

AREA 2: Filing Systems and Storage

2.1: Active Files - Space, Equipment, and Supplies

Component 30	Phases of File Management Where Used
Active Files - Space, Equipment, and Supplies	Case initiation, maintenance, disposition to closing

Standard:

Filing Considerations:

The filing system should be viewed in the context of the four distinct phases of case processing so that the system provides a continuum of activity from initiation to inactive storage to ultimate disposition of the records (kept permanently or destroyed). The filing system will affect the paperflow and workflow in the court; hence, staff, files, and equipment should be located in relation to each other.

- Case Initiation: Once a case jacket or file has been opened, it should contain all case-related documents to facilitate active case monitoring.
- Active Case Monitoring: Administrative control over case processing is essential so that records (including registers of actions, calendars, and case files) can be located quickly when needed. Determine whether the court needs a centralized active file room or decentralized filing scheme with files for each case processing section near the staff working with them. The size and organization of court staff may affect the organization and location of these files.
- Case Disposition to Closing: Case files should be in chronological order for disposition processing. Develop a case closing procedure when appropriate to ensure all essential and required documents are in the file.
- Post-Adjudication: Active case files and supporting records may be moved to inactive status. Such files should be moved to an inactive storage area because of the reduced need for rapid access and to make room in the active filing system for new records. Organize files into groups and consider inactive microfilming to save space and increase security and accessibility. Some records may have to be kept active for further processing, including appeal processing. Records which are reopened for further actions such as criminal post-conviction relief, garnishment or other civil judgment execution, support enforcement, or adjustments in domestic relations cases should be kept in active files.

Case File Management Standards

2.1: Active Files - Space, Equipment,
and Supplies (continued)

Component 30 (continued)	Phases of File Management Where Used
Active Files - Space, Equipment, and Supplies	Case initiation, maintenance, disposition to closing

Assessing Space and Equipment Needs for Active Filing Systems:

There are four basic considerations for filing systems for each type of record: 1) type of record or record series; 2) filing arrangement; 3) filing equipment; and 4) filing supplies. The first step in designing and developing a new filing and records management system is to list the components of the present system. See formula to assess filing space in the **Appendix**.

- **List Components of Present System**
Prepare a chart or list of the present location of files, record series title, span of years, inclusive case numbers and number of case files, status of files, files per inch, volume in cubic feet, equipment quantity and type, and any other pertinent information.
- **Determine Filing Arrangement**
 1. Analyze the information collected to determine how large the active filing and inactive systems need to be for each case type. A general rule is that when 90 to 95 percent of the cases for a given year are no longer active, they should be moved en masse to inactive storage.
 2. For each group of case types, calculate the average number of cases per file inch. From that calculate the number of filing inches needed for active files, allowing some space for growth.
 3. An alternative to keeping case files in one-year numerical blocks is to move them to inactive storage as they become inactive/closed. This requires a cross-reference either on the file shelf, in the index, or on the register of actions so that the appropriate storage box can be located when an inactive file is needed. A few lingering cases should not be used as an excuse to keep large quantities of unneeded inactive records in prime office space.
 4. Case types that have a higher-than-average reopening rate such as domestic relations cases do not need to be kept in the active filing system numerically in whole-year blocks since the reactivated cases can be retrieved individually as needed.
 5. Develop a realistic policy for moving case files to an inactive status to ease office congestion.

Case File Management Standards

2.1: Active Files - Space, Equipment,
and Supplies (continued)

Component 30 (continued)	Phases of File Management Where Used
Active Files - Space, Equipment, and Supplies	Case initiation, maintenance, disposition to closing

- Filing Equipment
 1. Based on the number of filing inches needed for active files, use the conversion chart in the **Appendix** to determine the filing equipment needed. By calculating the number of active files (by filing inches) that probably will be on hand at any given time, the size of the active filing system can be kept fairly constant.
 2. Filing equipment and supplies should comprise no more than 15% to 30% of total system costs. A simple filing system is preferable provided it can efficiently accommodate needs of the present and foreseeable future.
 3. Match filing equipment to court use. Avoid forcing files into outdated or inadequate filing equipment.
 4. For increased compaction, high-quality open-shelving mounted on tracks to form movable aisles may be considered. However, there are tradeoffs in speed of access and higher installation costs so this type of filing should be carefully evaluated before being adopted.
 5. Plan the basic filing equipment design and layout.
 6. Most common types of equipment include: 1) fixed lateral shelving; 2) hanging open-box; 3) movable lateral shelving; 4) drawer filing; 5) transfer boxes; 6) mechanized filing; 7) card files; 8) top or open reference; and 9) microfilm filing.
- Filing Supplies (see also Component 6)
 1. Determine appropriate internal components such as file folders, file guides, file supports, and out-folders.
 2. In selecting a file folder, become familiar with the variety of sturdiness and other features and choose a folder that suits the application and meets the criteria of cost effectiveness and efficiency.
 3. In an open-shelf lateral filing system, the tab should be on the side of the folder. A full side tab is recommended to accommodate color-coded numbers and letters for the case number.
 4. Standard 2" file (or Acco) fasteners help keep papers in their proper chronological order although documents have to be punched or drilled. Two fasteners on the right and left sides of a file folder can be used, but require more care in training which documents should be filed on the right and left sides. Fasteners should be factory applied or of the self-adhesive type.

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2.1: Active Files - Space, Equipment,
and Supplies (continued)

Component 30 (continued)	Phases of File Management Where Used
Active Files - Space, Equipment, and Supplies	Case initiation, maintenance, disposition to closing

5. A self-adhesive label is easy to prepare and apply to the front of a file folder. There should be no need to incur the added expense of preprinting any information on a file folder.
6. File guides act as internal signposts in the active filing system. They identify sections to speed up retrieval and refiling. Place them every 50 or so folders or every 6 to 10 inches apart. Choose the right quantity and good quality of file guides.
7. Out-cards or out-folders should be used. The out-card should be made of stiff card stock with preprinted entries for the date, case number, and name of the individual who checked out the file. Out-folders are generally made of durable vinyl with a clear plastic diagonal pocket to place new documents received until the file is returned and a clear plastic pocket which holds a 3" x 5" out-slip containing the date, case number, and name of the individual who checked out the file.
- Color-Coding
 1. Color-coding is used on the file tab to identify the case number (year, number, and case-type code). The banks should line up with each other on an open-shelf lateral file to distinguish between ones, tens, hundreds, and thousands.
 2. Use folders with the color bands affixed by the manufacturer, reserving hand-applied colored tabs for overflow backup folders in voluminous cases.
 3. Vendors have their own color-coding scheme, so chose a vendor that can be relied on for resupply of folders and labels.
- Support Equipment/Filing Accessories
 1. Consider filing accessories such as retractable workshelves, placed every 3 or 4 units apart for laying files on when the files are being updated.
 2. Use of file carts especially designed to move files around can aid in sorting files for delivery or refiling.
 3. Use of sorting devices can aid in the preliminary arrangement of records for filing.

Cross References: See Component 6 - Case File Folder/Jacket. See the **Appendix** for formulas to assess filing space need, for a volume and linear dimension conversion table, and for a guide for equipment evaluation.



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AREA 2: Filing Systems and Storage

2.2: Inactive Records Storage

By definition and design, an active filing system will lead to a continuous movement of records from active to an inactive filing system or records storage area. Records move much slower in an inactive records storage area than in an active filing system, but records are being added, individual records continue to be accessed periodically, and material must be moved out for destruction or transfer to another location such as an archive or microfilm center. The purpose of inactive records storage is simply to move inactive/closed case files from prime space to lower-cost space where records may be more densely packed and are accessed with decreasing frequency as they become older. An inactive system is easier to expand as the need arises than an active filing system. The records retention and disposal schedule is the primary tool used to manage accumulations of records. It identifies records that can be destroyed and those that should be retained. With information about active files and retention periods for inactive records, the general amount of storage space needed over a fairly long period can be determined.

Component 31	Phases of File Management Where Used
Inactive Records Storage	Post-Adjudication

Standard:

Assessing Amount of Inactive Records:

- Determine what and how many inactive records are on hand.
- Use the same type of inventory or survey used for the active filing system to plan and design an accessible and workable inactive records storage system.

Options for Records Storage:

Three main options for long-term inactive records storage should be considered: 1) in-house, court-controlled inactive storage; 2) records center run by the city, county, or state; 3) commercial records storage facility.

Records Storage Facilities:

- Make the greatest possible use of the space (width, depth, and height).
- Provide for reasonable access (aisle width) to stored records.
- Provide for adequate lighting. Aisle ways should be lighted for safety and aid in working conditions. Consider zoned lighting to conserve energy. Install more light in office and research areas.
- Provide for security and protection of stored records against fire, water, environment, pests and vermin, vandalism, theft, and loss.

Case File Management Standards

2.2: Inactive Records Storage
(continued)

Component 31 (continued)	Phases of File Management Where Used
Inactive Records Storage	Post-Adjudication

- Consider including space for researchers to review records, an office for staff, and a work area for processing records or for microfilm preparation.

Safety and Environmental Considerations:

- Fire Damage
 1. Institute prevention policies including cleanliness, electrical system maintenance, and a prohibition on smoking.
 2. Stress early detection by installing smoke alarms.
 3. Consider installing fire alarms, fire extinguishers, and a sprinkler system (250 - 286 degrees Fahrenheit rating; independently activated heads).
- Water Damage
 1. Eliminate/avoid overhead pipes.
 2. Ensure that the bottom of the lowest shelf is at least 4" off the floor.
- Environmental Damage
 1. Maintain the optimal temperature range (65 - 75 degrees Fahrenheit).
 2. Maintain the optimal humidity range (50% - 60%).
- Preventing Pest and Vermin Damage
 1. Call the exterminator as soon as signs appear.
 2. Take preventive action to prevent a recurrence.
- Preventing Vandalism, Theft, and Loss
 1. Establish and enforce an access control policy.
 2. Install a special security cage for confidential and sensitive records.

Inactive Records Storage Equipment:

- Steel frame warehouse-type shelving is recommended.
- Shelves may be plywood or 5/8" particle board.
- For lateral side-tabbed files, a front-opening box is recommended.
- Stack boxes two high on each shelf and two deep for increased density.
- Select shelving strong enough for full records boxes that weigh 30 to 50 pounds each
- Design system so shelving uses most of the vertical space within a room not to exceed 12-14 feet).
- Have on hand a good quality step-ladder on wheels that lock down when the ladder is mounted.

Case File Management Standards

2.2: Inactive Records Storage
(continued)

Component 31 (continued)	Phases of File Management Where Used
Inactive Records Storage	Post-Adjudication

Records Storage Area Supplies:

- For bound books and odd-sized material, determine special equipment configurations and box sizes.
- Use standard top-opening, one-cubic-foot records storage boxes. Legal-size files can be placed in the box lengthwise and letter-size breadthwise.
- Avoid 2 ½ cubic-foot storage boxes and drawer-type transfer boxes since they can cost three or four times as much as a standard box and weigh 80 to 90 pounds when full.
- If appropriate, consider movable shelving for greater compaction. Costs are substantially higher than a basic warehouse shelving and storage box system.

Managing Inactive Records Storage Area:

A procedures manual should be developed to ensure orderly and efficient operation of inactive storage and to state policies concerning access to and control of the records. Other operational considerations are listed below:

- Space Numbering System
Use space numbering system to indicate location of each box within the facility and as a cross-reference in the facility index. Two methods of numbering are by row-space number and via sequential zigzag (used in smaller facilities). In row-space numbering, each aisle is given a sequential number and each row is evenly subdivided into spaces. In sequential zigzag numbering, neither the aisles or rows are numbered.
- Indexing
Existing alphabetic indexes can be used to determine a particular case number. However, a special index should be maintained to determine the status and location of each inactive file since they may be reactivated and returned to active records areas, transferred to archives, or destroyed. The simplest method is a transfer list consisting of the case number, location, and status of each record. The register of actions may be used as a transfer list by simply adding the appropriate information.
- Initial Storage
 1. Pack records for inactive storage when they are still in active storage rooms.
 2. Clearly label the box on the end facing the aisle with case numbers included and any exceptions.

Case File Management Standards

2.2: Inactive Records Storage
(continued)

Component 31 (continued)	Phases of File Management Where Used
Inactive Records Storage	Post-Adjudication

3. Assign boxes the appropriate sequential box number.
4. Note the box number and records series information to the transfer list.
5. Note the storage space to be occupied on the box and the transfer list.
6. Maintain one copy of the transfer list in the clerk's office and another in the storage area.
7. Note any further transfers (to remote storage or archives) on the court transfer list.
- Access Retrieval and Charge-Out Procedure
 1. Limit access to authorized court records personnel.
 2. Have persons desiring records located in a storage area fill out a request form.
 3. Periodically prepare statistics regarding access to the records from the request forms to determine which records are no longer needed locally and can be transferred to a more remote storage area.
 4. Use a charge-out card listing the borrower and record title. Place in the box in place of the removed record. A multipart form can be used, one part being attached to the charge-out card, the second part given to the borrower, and the third part placed in a tickler file for followup. Require the borrower to sign for the borrowed record.
 5. Do not allow the case file to leave the clerk's office or courthouse facilities.
 6. Provide adequate reproduction equipment to produce document copies when required.
- Refiles and Interfiles
 1. After use, return inactive case files to their proper location in batches.
 2. Interfiling consists of adding documents to the existing records. Keep interfiling to a minimum for inactive records since storage space must be provided to allow the files to expand.
- Reactivated Cases
 1. When an inactive case is reactivated, retrieve folder and refile in the active filing system.
 2. Use charge-out card to note status and location of the reactivated file. Keep the space open in inactive storage that was previously occupied by the file.
 3. When the file is returned to inactive storage, replace in the proper filing order.
- Disposal of Record

Dispose of or remove records in a court-operated inactive records facility on a regular basis according to the requirements of the records retention and disposal schedule. See **Area 4** for details. Secure written authorization for destruction. Update transfer list or other index as records are disposed or transferred.